

ELIGIBILITY AND ORDER OF SELECTION FACT SHEET

Q. *What is Vocational Rehabilitation?*

- A. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a federal/state program that helps people with disabilities to enter, maintain, or return to employment. Our charge is to help those people achieve and maintain meaningful careers.

Q. *Who is eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services?*

- A. If you have a physical or mental impairment that makes it difficult for you to find or keep a job and you need our services to do so, you may be eligible. We will determine eligibility based on medical and/or psychological records, along with an assessment of how your disability affects your ability to work. A person who receives Social Security Disability Insurance benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Insurance benefits (SSI) as a result of disability or blindness is presumed to be eligible, if that person intends to enter employment.

Q. *What kinds of services does the VR agency provide?*

- A. Services are provided based on the person's abilities, interests, and informed choice and may include training, medical or psychological treatment that would increase the individual's ability to work, rehabilitation technology, job placement and follow-up, and post-employment services. All clients receive counseling and guidance as an integral part of their services to help the person reach his or her employment potential.

Q. *What if I want training or other services, but I don't want to go to work?*

- A. All VR services are provided for the purpose of preparing a person to enter employment, return to employment, or maintain employment.

Q. *I receive SSDI benefits, and I am afraid that if I go to work, I will lose my Medicare. How can a person who receives SSDI or SSI disability benefits find out how VR services or employment would affect their benefits?*

- A. A VR counselor would put you in touch with a benefits specialist who can help you find out what you need to know about your SSDI or SSI benefits and can help you make work pay.

Q. *How can I apply for VR services?*

- A. You may find the contact information for your local VR office by looking in the government listings in your telephone book under Tennessee State Government, Human Services Department, Rehabilitation Services. If you need assistance locating the nearest office, you may contact the Nashville administrative office of the Division of Rehabilitation Services at (615) 313-4891.

Q. *My VR counselor told me I am eligible for services, but can't receive those services because of the order of selection. What is an order of selection?*

- A. Federal law states that if there is not enough funding available to provide services to all persons who are eligible, state VR programs must give first priority for services to applicants who have the most significant disabilities and limitations. Tennessee's VR program has funding to provide services only to those individuals who have the most significant disabilities and who are designated as "Priority Category 1".

Q. *My VR counselor has informed me that my case is in Priority Category 3. What would qualify a person to be in Priority Category 1?*

- A. VR must consider not only the disability (diagnosis), but also the limitations that the individual experiences, as a result of the disability, that would have an impact on the ability to enter or

maintain employment. In order to be determined as having a most significant disability, an individual would have a severe disability that creates serious limitations in at least 2 of 7 capacity areas. These include mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills, as documented by medical, psychological, and/or vocational assessments. The individual must also require multiple vocational rehabilitation services that are expected to be needed over at least a 6-month time period. All services provided must be for the purpose of helping the client prepare for, retain, or maintain a successful employment outcome.

Q. *If I receive SSI or SSDI, do I automatically receive vocational rehabilitation services?*

A. A person who receives Social Security Disability Insurance benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Insurance benefits (SSI) as a result of disability or blindness is presumed to be eligible and *at least* Priority Category 2, if he or she intends to enter employment. These VR clients are considered to have a serious limitation in work skills, and if they meet the requirements for one of the other limitations (mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance), they will be in Priority Category 1. They do not have to meet the requirement of needing multiple services over at least a 6-month time period.

Q. *Is the priority category affected by the cost of the services that I need?*

A. No. The law says that no other factors, such as cost of service, income, type of disability, etc. can be used to determine assignment to a priority category.

Q. *What if my case is assigned to Priority Category 2, 3, or 4, but then my condition and limitations get worse?*

A. Any time that your disability and limitations get worse, you should contact your VR counselor and ask for a re-evaluation. Also, if further medical or psychological documentation becomes available, you should send it to your VR counselor and ask for re-evaluation of your priority category.

Q. *Are there any VR services that I can receive if I am in Priority Category 2, 3, or 4?*

A. VR cannot provide direct services to those eligible individuals who are not in Priority Category 1, but the VR counselor must provide information and referral services to help those persons find services through other agencies and entities.

Q. *If my VR case is in Priority Category 2, 3, or 4, will the case be closed after a certain period of time?*

A. No. Your case will remain open until:

- Information is available that would allow it to be reclassified to a higher priority category; or
- Funding becomes available to provide services to eligible individuals in other priority categories; or
- You and your counselor agree that your case should be closed.

Q. *Are there other states operating under an order of selection?*

A. Yes. In fact, there are 45 out of 80 agencies currently operating under an order of selection.

Q. *Is it likely that Tennessee's VR program will be able to provide services in the near future to clients whose cases are not in Priority Category 1?*

A. Tennessee's VR program has been under an order of selection since August 1, 2001. We do not anticipate that the order of selection will be lifted at any time in the near future. Our focus is to provide the best and most effective vocational rehabilitation services that we can provide to help individuals with the most significant disabilities to reach their career goals.